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REV. LILY HENRY, BUNKER HILL, ILLS.

EARLY WOMEN PREACHERS OF ILLINOIS.

[By MRS. KATHERINE STAHL.]

In writing up the last two decades of the first one hundred years history of Illinois Statehood, we can proudly name quite a number of brilliant women who are occupying pulpits in churches as regular pastors—preaching the gospel, teaching advanced Bible classes and leading in missionary work at home and abroad. In the light of this acceptable truth it seems unbelievable that our grandfathers and grandmothers could not give like testimony concerning the times in which they lived; but they could not so testify.

It will never be disputed that women have always excelled in the matter of pointing out the upward way, but for hundreds of years they had to do it by example and private precept. The gospel as taught by women under discouraging limitations has certainly turned many men to righteousness and caused them to become gospel messengers, going about doing good. When it came to women preaching the word in public! That was quite another story! Any woman, however pious and worthy she might be, who was brave enough to venture a pulpit delivery of the “glad tidings of salvation,” was at once beaten back with: “Let your women keep silence in the churches!” Men who had done little reading and much less writing; men who had no uplifting message to give; men who truly did not know whether this injunction on women came from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or leading teachers of the new testament, claimed to know that women must not speak to a congregation!

Each woman must teach the children of one man in one home regardless of the good she might do for the children of other men in other homes who could receive lasting benefit from the words she might publicly speak and in no other way. But who ever knew a woman who felt her sufficiency was of God, who would flinch from any duty when once convinced she had a duty and was capable of performing it? Women

nave always done pioneer work in the way of civilization and gospel teaching in all our states.

I do not know when women began to preach publicly in Illinois, but I do remember that about sixty years ago women preachers must have been scarce in the State because when one wanted to preach she was given a severe and discouraging examination by the elders and deacons of the churches to which application was made by her for permission to serve a congregation.

I do not remember hearing my parents or any one else speak of any woman preaching in Illinois till in the late fifties, probably fifty-seven or fifty-eight. At that time a Mrs. Hubbard came into Madison County and preached on several different occasions in the old Mount Olive Meeting house which is still standing (1916) a deserted, but not a dilapidated building, in the south side of Foster Township on a farm owned by Mr. Samuel H. Culp. This meeting house was "put up" in the spring of 1851, and after the manner of the Deacon's Masterpiece it was made of the stoutest oak which couldn't "be split nor bent, nor broke." It is made of hewn timbers by men expert with the old time broad-ax.

It is slightly beyond the text of pioneer women preachers to speak of this old church and its construction, but since it is where one of the first woman preachers did some preaching, I venture to speak of it. It is to be observed that "meeting house" is the expression used because in those days of old the folks had no churches and no salaried pastors of churches. Instead of these, there were "meeting houses" and "preachers," not clergymen or ministers of the gospel, but just preachers; mostly journeymen preachers who went from place to place and preached for love and not for money. Their mode of travel was usually on horseback. They were gladly entertained without money and without price and much of their preaching was done in private houses; even log houses where hospitality was seldom equaled and never excelled. Where a community had a real Simon-pure meeting house dedicated and held sacred to orthodox male preaching, that community was looked upon as one most favored of the gods.

It was in one of these favored places that Mrs. Hubbard asked the privilege of preaching, and though I was a very young child at the time, my memory was stimulated by the furore that arose among men, the conferences they held to consider the effect on the community of letting a woman preach to men. They had doubts about their meeting house and their religion being able to stand the innovation. Their curiosity was stronger than their objections, and after deciding in favor of letting Mrs. Hubbard speak "in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation," the question arose: "Will it be wise for us men to allow our wives, sisters, daughters and especially our mothers-in-law to attend the service?" The decision must have been favorable for I remember that the house was crowded with men, women and children. Many men came out from Alton—four miles distant—also a few women. In those days people thought nothing of walking five miles or more to attend church services, and it was no drawback for everybody to take all the children to church from the least to the greatest. I know nothing of the doctrines set forth by Mrs. Hubbard, but presume she was a Hardshell Baptist, since she was among men and women of that sturdy religion. She preached repeatedly and always to a crowded house. I do not know where she came from nor whither she went.

Soon after Mrs. Hubbard's advent in Madison County, another woman preacher came and held services in a little meeting house called Antioch. It was located in the north side of Foster Township on land belonging to the Hamilton and Gray heirs. This church building has long since passed away. It was known as a "Campbellite Church," the sect termed disciples at the present day.

It is claimed that this woman, Mrs. Henry, met with little opposition compared with that which met Mrs. Hubbard. She preached acceptably at Antioch in regular monthly meetings for several years; only ceasing her work there when the Civil War came on putting a blight on church work and every thing else. While I was too young to remember definitely this lady's clerical successes in those days, I was fortunate enough to become personally acquainted with her some years later when

she came to the town where I was teaching my first school in another state, and conducted a revival for a month or more.

In this revival meeting she was very successful in turning many to righteousness and also in removing much of the prejudice fostered by men who thought women must keep silence in the churches.

Mrs. Henry was a woman of education, refinement and culture; magnetic in person, a talented elocutionist and a very sweet singer. She led the singing in all her services and insisted on congregational singing, preferring that no musical instrument beyond a tuning fork be used. In those years there was about as much dispute over organs in churches as there was about women preaching. The organs could not speak for themselves, Mrs. Henry said; while the women could; and when the women got established the organs and other instruments of praise would come without controversy. Until then "let everything that hath breath praise the Lord" with their voices. The woman preacher's prophecy of fifty years ago is fulfilled. The women are established and so are the organs.

Mrs. Henry was well versed in the scriptures. She studied the Bible daily, and if ever any one meditated on the laws of the Lord continually, she did. She not only meditated on the sacred law, but she applied it to herself and the people whom she met. I have been with her when some prejudiced egotist assailed her, falsely accused her and very despitely used her, but never for once could any one ruffle her calm spirit. Nor did ever any assailant go from her without feeling abashed and ashamed. After listening to a tirade of invective and profanity, she would pleasantly ask: "Did you pray over me and get these messages you've been delivering to me from the Lord?" then she would invite the offender to hear her preach and sing; such invitations were accepted and she usually brought her sinner to repentance.

Mrs. Henry was truly a great preacher, having the proper spirit for pioneer work that would open the way and did open the doors for women to do good in every way and in every place. She was very modest, never put herself forward in any way; but she stood her ground well and suffered no one to put her to flight. She went into villages and small towns

to preach, she never could be prevailed upon to preach in cities or to go to eastern states. She only wanted to do good and had no desire to be a celebrity. Her home, when I knew her, was in Bunker Hill, Illinois. She was a wife and a mother. Her husband delighted in her and her children arose up to bless her. All who truly knew her rejoiced in their knowledge of her. When the demands of the Gospel began to consume all her time, and her children had taken their places in the world, Mrs. Henry became an itinerant preacher and evangelist in the western states. She labored acceptably in Missouri, Kansas and Nebraska for a long time, then went to California, Oregon and Washington, the latter a territory then. For some years I kept in touch with Mrs. Henry, but eventually the cares of married life and the labor of helping my husband pay for our farm home, caused our communications to default, and though I have tried to connect them again in order to give a proper finish to this meager sketch, I have failed in every effort. Rev. Lily Henry is probably not living now, but the good work she did in behalf of women still lives; the trail she blazed for women to follow will never grow dim.

MORO, ILLINOIS, *Hallowe'en, Nineteen Sixteen.*

MY DEAR MRS. WEBER.

Quite unexpectedly I encountered some one a few days ago who could tell me of Mrs. Henry, and I hasten to pass the item on to you that you may attach it or connect it up in some way with what I have already handed in—perhaps in the way of a footnote.

Some time near 1900 Mrs. Henry felt that her days on earth were few. With broken health and far from home, she started back to Bunker Hill, Ill., got as far as Chicago, went into a hospital where an operation for her relief was performed. She lingered a short while and passed away. She was laid to rest in the Bunker Hill cemetery.

This was all I could learn of Mrs. Henry who had endeared herself to me in mothering me at a time I most needed mothering, and would have failed to get it, but for her.

I will not detain you further for I know you are busy and so am I. If only I had strength to do the work that is

near me clamoring to be done, I could rest easier. But I must "commit my way unto the Lord; trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass." That golden text holds much comfort for me. I hope it does for you.

KATHERINE STAHL.